

"HOW THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES HAVE  
SOLVED THEIR HOUSING PROBLEMS"

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Miss Porter has just completed a year of European Study.  
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It would perhaps be difficult if not impossible to find in any European country a well-informed person who would claim that his country has altogether solved its housing problem. However, in practically every one of the European countries one is impressed by the fact that since the World War these countries have gone far towards rehousing a large part of their population. The movement for improved housing conditions has been the outstanding social achievement of European nations since the World War. This movement has reached into every one of the European countries and wherever one goes he is impressed with the huge housing developments. Complete figures are not available but literally millions of new housing units have been constructed.

The housing question in Europe is not new and though aggravated by the World War, is not the result of it. New houses had long been needed particularly for families with small incomes. By 1919 the shortage was too obvious to be ignored since no houses had been built during the four years of the war, years during which people had been crowding into the towns for work or for safety. So that the first reason for a housing movement was the existence of a housing shortage. The second reason was that throughout Europe since the World War there had been an increasing interest in social problems and the emergence of a new social consciousness. Those European nations which had engaged in the war and those which are threatened by the next war have come to have a new appreciation of the national value of the masses of the people. A nation that next year might have to fight for its life knows that the health and efficiency of the men and women who are to defend it in time of crisis are of great national concern. Therefore, in a sense the housing of the populations of Europe is the first step in sane national defense. Because the shadow of war hangs daily over the British Isles, there is a new concern on the part of this nation for the health, diet and housing of the masses of its people.



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Western Europe is strongly capitalistic. The revolution in Russia overthrew capitalism and inaugurated a socialistic state whose first objective was the destruction of poverty and insecurity. In their place the revolutionists planned to put security and opportunity for the masses of the people. As a guarantee that this promise would be kept, a proletarian state was set up and the masses of the Russian people took charge of the government and undertook to demonstrate that with the government in their hands they could provide for themselves that security and opportunity which no capitalistic state up to that time had been able to guarantee its people. The revolution in Russia undoubtedly made a strong impression on the workers in Western European nations and there was a time following the World War when it looked as though the revolution in Russia might sweep over all Europe and completely overthrow European capitalism. The political and economic leaders in these capitalistic nations recognized that the system faced a real threat and that if it were to survive, capitalism must demonstrate its ability to do for the masses of the people at least some of the things which the Russian Revolution had set out to do. This fear of revolution has been one of the powerful motives which has led to much of the social improvement undertaken by the Western European countries. They looked upon housing, social security, health service for the masses of the people as insurance against violent revolutions. It is interesting to note that the most radical measures of social welfare have been put into effect in the British Isles by a Tory government.

Following the World War, there was a general depression throughout Europe and something was needed to stimulate the economic system and to re-employ millions of men who had been demobilized from the armies and war industries. The building of houses was the best possible means of restoring the economic balance and the vast housing program in England brought prosperity to the nation. It is the fixed policy of the Government of Sweden to expand its housing program whenever the economic system shows signs of depression.

The modern housing problem in Europe as well as in America is rooted in the industrial revolution and the phenomenal increase in urban population. In Great Britain between 1821 and 1936, country dwellers decreased from ten to nine and one-half million while urban dwellers increased from four to thirty-seven million. In Germany the country population dwindled from twenty-three million in 1801 to nineteen million in 1936, while the urban population rose from two million to forty-eight million.

This increase in urban population had taken place with little or no planning and had developed vast slum areas where life and decency were almost impossible. The masses of European workers lived under conditions that were unfit for normal human development, so that the problem was vast and complicated.



The first of these is the fact that the population of the United States is increasing at a rapid rate. This is due to a number of factors, including a high birth rate, a low death rate, and a large influx of immigrants. The second factor is the fact that the population is becoming more urbanized. This is due to the fact that people are moving from rural areas to cities in search of better living conditions and economic opportunities. The third factor is the fact that the population is becoming more educated. This is due to the fact that more people are attending school and obtaining higher levels of education. The fourth factor is the fact that the population is becoming more diverse. This is due to the fact that people from different ethnic backgrounds are moving to the United States and contributing to the cultural richness of the country. The fifth factor is the fact that the population is becoming more mobile. This is due to the fact that people are moving from one part of the country to another in search of better living conditions and economic opportunities. The sixth factor is the fact that the population is becoming more health conscious. This is due to the fact that people are becoming more aware of the importance of maintaining good health and are taking steps to do so. The seventh factor is the fact that the population is becoming more environmentally conscious. This is due to the fact that people are becoming more aware of the impact of their actions on the environment and are taking steps to reduce their carbon footprint. The eighth factor is the fact that the population is becoming more technologically savvy. This is due to the fact that people are becoming more familiar with the use of technology and are incorporating it into their daily lives. The ninth factor is the fact that the population is becoming more socially conscious. This is due to the fact that people are becoming more aware of social issues and are taking steps to address them. The tenth factor is the fact that the population is becoming more politically engaged. This is due to the fact that people are becoming more interested in the political process and are taking steps to participate in it.

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It soon became clear that the responsibility for initiating and carrying out an adequate housing program could only be undertaken by the government itself since a public body alone could afford to undertake the responsibility for unremunerative housing schemes on a scale adequate to meet the needs. In every one of the European countries the government has led in initiating their housing program so that directly or indirectly the government has been responsible for these developments.

The governments have provided the money and credits, established standards, planned the developments where necessary, furnished subsidies and determined the rents.

In every European country it is recognized that in order to house low income families, government subsidies are necessary. In some countries the subsidy is as high as 50 percent for houses for the low income groups. In no country is the subsidy less than 20 percent for this type of house. Subsidies for houses for low income families had been accepted as a matter of public policy. These subsidies are of several types. In England the subsidy has been in the form of a direct cash grant. In Sweden and Germany the subsidy has been in the form of publicly owned lands for which almost no rent is charged when used for housing low income groups. Low interest rates and a direct contribution to the rent are other forms of subsidy. In France there is a great interest in increasing the population. There subsidy is based in part on the number of children in the family. Large families pay little or practically no rent.

Most foreign housing authorities believe that in the long run the best form of subsidy is the public ownership of land which can be used for these low income houses. In Sweden and Germany most cities have already acquired the land which will be needed for future housing for many generations to come. In this way land prices are controlled and adequate land is always available and can be supplied by the municipality as a necessary subsidy for low income families. This public control of the land also makes possible orderly development and adequate planning.

The older European cities have grown slowly and without any special guidance. Because of the slow growth, the lack of order and uniformity in the older sections of these cities, a certain charm is to be found in spite of their discomfort and inconvenience as measured by modern standards. The newer industrial cities grew rapidly, land values were inflated and as a result most of these industrial cities are crowded, ugly and unhealthy and offer little in the way of recreational and community life. Because of this experience with the industrial cities, European nations generally have come to accept the fact that the development of cities must be planned if these cities are to be decent places in which human beings may live. Today city planning has come to have a definite place in every phase of urban expansion. These new city plans provide for the correction of mistakes which have been made in the past for proper relation between industrial, residential and business development. They provide for orderliness, beauty and recreational facilities.



It was pointed out that the responsibility for industrial and commercial development must rest with the Government. It was stated that the Government must take the initiative in the development of the country. It was also stated that the Government must take the initiative in the development of the country. It was also stated that the Government must take the initiative in the development of the country.

In every country, it is recognized that in order to have a strong economy, it is necessary to have a strong industrial base. It was stated that the Government must take the initiative in the development of the country. It was also stated that the Government must take the initiative in the development of the country. It was also stated that the Government must take the initiative in the development of the country.

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The other two main areas have been agriculture and industry. It was stated that the Government must take the initiative in the development of the country. It was also stated that the Government must take the initiative in the development of the country. It was also stated that the Government must take the initiative in the development of the country. It was also stated that the Government must take the initiative in the development of the country.



More and more housing in Europe has come to be part of city planning and any housing project must fit into the general plan for the development of the city.

As in America, public housing in Europe was at first confined to cities. Today in almost every part of Europe the government is giving attention to housing low income farm families. Although late in development, the problem of rural housing is now receiving very serious attention. Many of the lower income farm families in Europe have been miserably housed. European cities are over-crowded and there is a tendency for the farm population to continue to drift into the cities. Furthermore, the production of food in many of these countries is an important part in the national defense. It is, therefore, the usual policy in Europe to improve rural housing so much that rural people will not be tempted to go into the cities. In fact in Italy and some other European countries the houses provided for rural families are superior to those generally furnished urban families on a similar income level.

As in the case of low income city dwellers, subsidies have become necessary in order to provide decent houses for low income farm families and it is the policy of the European governments to furnish the necessary subsidies. In England the administration of the housing law is in the hands of the county governments. These county governments have authority to condemn any house unfit for human habitation and demolish it. In replacing the house according to standard set up by the government, 90 percent of the cost is furnished as a subsidy by the central government and 10 percent by the county government: the law provides in such cases that the restored house must always be occupied by a low income family at a rental not in excess of what had been paid for the old house. In cases where additional new houses are necessary to properly house low income farm families, the county councils are authorized to provide such houses. The central government provides a subsidy of from \$50 to \$60 annually for forty years. The county councils are taking their task very seriously and there is a real beginning of housing low income farm families throughout the British Isles. Similar movements are underway in Italy, Germany and the Scandinavian countries.

The housing experiment in Europe has demonstrated the following facts:

(1) Housing is a social function and if it is to be done adequately, the government must assume responsibility either directly, or through indirect assistance to co-operatives and private builders. (2) The control of the land by public bodies is the best safeguard for orderly development and for providing houses for low income families. (3) Subsidy is necessary in order to supply decent houses to the lowest income families. The experiment in Europe would seem to indicate that subsidized housing for these poor families is a sound national investment. (4) The needs for rehousing the rural population are just as great as that of cities. While later in developing, rural housing follows the same general pattern and results in the same social values.



